

Hap and Leonard

SundanceTV's series with Michael K. Williams, James Purefoy and Christina Hendricks is a tasty Texas noir

By Daniel J. Fienberg

THE CHALLENGE OF adapting Joe R. Lansdale's *Hap and Leonard* series is that of adapting any of the prolific scribe's books: Character, setting and atmospherics are front and center, but the stories fall outside any easily embraceable or commercial genre.

In 1988 in a fictional Texas town, Hap Collins (James Purefoy of *Rome* and *The Following*) and Leonard Pine (Michael K. Williams of *The Wire* and *Boardwalk Empire*) are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, working the rose fields. Hap is a former '60s idealist and an ex-con; Leonard is a gay Vietnam vet. They chew the fat and kickbox and keep their aspirations low. Sometimes in Lansdale's

nine-book series, they solve crimes — but they're not exactly detectives.

Directed in its early installments by Jim Mickle and written by Mickle and Nick Damici, the first season of SundanceTV's *Hap and Leonard* is taken from Lansdale's *Savage Season*, in which our main characters are lured into a recovery mission for a stolen fortune by Hap's ex-wife, Trudy (Christina Hendricks).

The friendship between Hap and Leonard is characterized by politically incorrect banter, affectionate antagonism and ride-or-die dedication, and some of their back-and-forth felt more natural on the page. Still, much of this version works. Mickle and Damici deftly

capture Lansdale's pulpy, sweat-drenched world, in which attitudes toward race and sexuality are slow to change with the times. And the actors are very fine. Leonard is a part so full of wit, warmth and looming menace that none of Williams' trademark charisma is wasted. Purefoy's accent is all over the map — and periodically across the pond — but he nails the studied ease of a man who once cared about things, stopped caring and now just coasts on charm. He also crackles with Hendricks, who brings the perfect '50s femme fatale vibe to a story whose sexuality has been

somewhat tamed for basic cable.

In our age of longer Netflix or premium cable running times, *Hap and Leonard*'s first three 45-minute episodes, with their sometimes light narratives, can feel thin. But there's enough here to hope for a bit more intensity in the three remaining episodes: With Mickle and Damici in their comfort zone and Williams and Purefoy invaluable anchors, *Hap and Leonard* should be a winner for SundanceTV.

Airdate 10 p.m. Wednesday, March 2 (SundanceTV)



Hendricks and Purefoy
ooze chemistry in
SundanceTV's new series.